



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

February 10, 2005

News Release

CEDAR RAPIDS CONVICTION LATEST STEP IN DISMANTLING WORLDWIDE VISA FRAUD ORGANIZATION *Scheme allowed scores to illegally enter dozens of countries*

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa—An investigation launched by local U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents resulted in a jury convicting a Guinean man today on three counts of document and visa fraud.

Abdulaziz Bah, 38, of Guinea, was convicted in District Court for the Northern District of Iowa on two counts of possessing fraudulent documents and one count of conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government. The conspiracy count includes: wire fraud, mail fraud and manufacturing and transferring of various fraudulent documents. Bah is also required to forfeit \$325,000, which represents the proceeds of his unlawful activity.



Fraudulent passports

The conviction is the latest step in dismantling a visa fraud organization that allowed scores of unknown people, who were issued fraudulently obtained visitor's visas, to illegally enter more than 30 countries worldwide.

"This conviction is a nail in the coffin of a massive visa fraud scheme that allowed an untold number of young men with false identities—and unknown backgrounds and intent—to move freely around the world," said Michael Vail, resident agent-in-charge of the ICE Cedar Rapids office. "As a result of our investigation, we understand that several foreign governments have tightened their requirements for obtaining visas to enter their countries."

The scheme in which Bah was a participant involved creating identities for imposters so that they appeared to be lawful permanent residents, or “green card” holders, of the United States. The U.S. documents produced for the scheme were primarily permanent resident cards and Social Security cards. The conspirators also obtained high-quality counterfeit passports from African countries such as Guinea, Sierra Leone and Senegal.

The conspirators then filled out visa applications and mailed them, along with the fraudulent identity documentation, to foreign consular offices located within the United States. The consular offices, believing the applicants were approved U.S. legal immigrants, would issue visas and mail them to U.S. addresses, including addresses in Cedar Rapids.

The conspirators then moved the visas and related false identity documents overseas, where unknown persons assumed the identities and traveled to the target countries for entry. The false identity documents seized by ICE investigators showed that the imposters were males from various African countries between 16 and 45 years old.

“We don’t know who these men were,” said Vail. “These are methods that criminals and terrorists employ.” Vail said that his investigators determined that some imposters, once they entered the target country, didn’t follow the planned itineraries as a requirement of the visa application process. “Once they entered these countries, they simply vanished. ICE plugged a significant hole in international security.”

ICE investigators estimate that over the past several years, hundreds of these imposters used the fraudulently obtained visas to illegally enter countries worldwide. The countries most frequently targeted for illegal entry were: Ireland, Belgium, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands, but more than 30 countries have been identified as having been targeted.

A co-conspirator in the scheme, Unis Bah (undetermined relation), pleaded guilty in August to making false statements to investigators. He is scheduled to be sentenced in U.S. District Court next week.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard Murphy of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Iowa.

ICE was assisted in the investigation by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Cedar Rapids Police Department and the FBI.

NOTE: For a JPEG digital image of some of the fraudulent passports, please contact Tim Counts at 952-853-2602 or via e-mail at Tim.Counts@dhs.gov.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.